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DEPARTMENT FOR SRAP, SCA/FO, SCA/A, EUR/RPM
STATE PASS USAID FOR ASIA/SCAA

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TAGS: PGOV PREL KDEM EAID AF
SUBJECT: PLANNING FOR GOVERNANCE CHANGES IN HELMAND

Classified By: PRT and Sub-National Governance Director Valerie C. Fowler for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) The U.K. has begun planning for governance changes in Helmand after August 20 elections, concerned that former governor and local powerbroker Sher Mohammad Akunzada (SMA) or his associates are working to return to Helmand. The UK, appropriately, is concerned that the improvements in governance, development, and security could quickly be undermined should President Karzai win reelection and appoint SMA or an SMA-backed candidate to serve as governor of Helmand. The British-led PRT is deeply concerned by the potential negative influence of these individuals on Helmand governance and the potential to undermine UK and U.S. operations and efforts in Helmand.

¶2. (C) During a June 30 meeting between PRT Civilian Head Hugh Powell and Helmand Governor Mangal, Powell pressed Mangal on his future plans. Mangal knows that President Karzai has promised SMA that Mangal will be removed quickly after the elections but Mangal could not name the planned replacement. Mangal is prepared for this event and reportedly appeared very calm about the whole process. Mangal declared he would need the "full support" of the President and the continued support of the international civilian, military, and development communities if he were to stay on in Helmand. When asked by Powell whether he would consider staying if he had the ability to do his job without interference, Mangal reportedly paused and said that might be a possibility if it could be arranged.

Comment

¶3. (C) Mangal seemed to open the door slightly to staying on in Helmand but he appears to have thought carefully about the conditions under which he would stay -- something close to a non-interference clause from Kabul. He seems now resigned to leaving after the elections, but as the date gets closer we will see if he expresses any wider interest in remaining and for how long.

¶4. (C) The UK is keen to ensure that -- should Karzai win -- he does not quickly return SMA or his associates to leadership positions in Helmand. PRT Head Hugh Powell reportedly has sent a think piece back to London on options. Post has engaged with the UK Embassy to consider strategies for ensuring qualified governors, rather than weak appointees who delivered votes for the elected President, are maintained post election. As an initial step, Post is discussing quietly with the UK the characteristics and qualifications of good governors and officials and how the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) could play a role in ensuring that strong governors are maintained post elections in key provinces like Helmand.

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